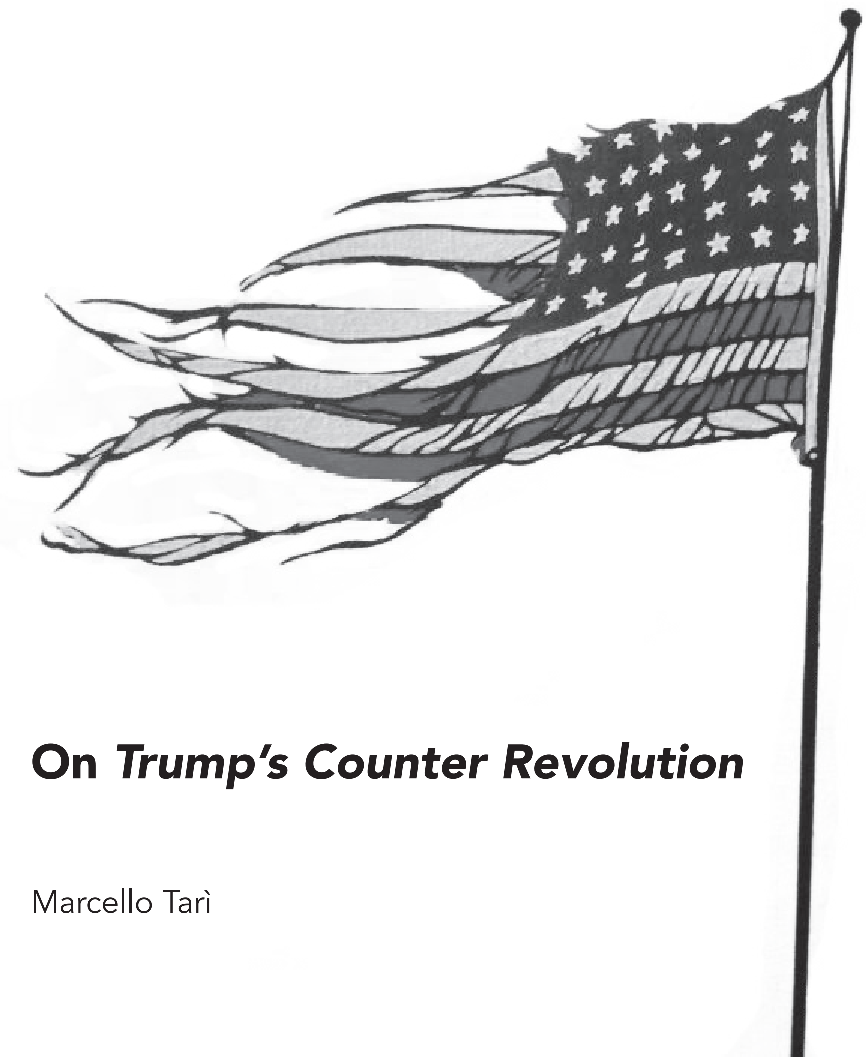
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WHAT IS POP FASCISM?



On *Trump's Counter Revolution*

Marcello Tarì

mocracy can save the world from the ongoing catastrophe. It's for this reason that Rasmussen concluded that the only alternative to fascism is one which aims for the destitution of a democracy that cannot be separated from capitalism.

> *« Sortir, sortir et encore sortir ! » est notre seul mot d'ordre.*
> ["Exit, exit and exit still!" is our only motto.]

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On *Trump's Counter Revolution*

Marcello Tarì

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What is also particularly important in Rasmussen's book is the discussion on the category of fascism as a current topic. Putting aside all of the false debates that will proclaim, among other things, that "fascism has returned" or that "there isn't Hitler or Mussolini, not a single brown or black shirt to justify such an analysis", the author treats fascism as any other ideological current (in the same way as socialism, anarchism, or liberalism have a history that changes them over time), and, consequently, in addition to presenting its local specificities and different ways of manifesting itself, fascism is not predictable to a single model, not even during the period between the two world wars, for that matter. This is why the swastika and fasces [fascist symbol of a bundle of sticks] have been substituted by Trump's baseball hat and Salvini's graphic t-shirts [*sweats*], and the difference between the formerly widespread portraits of the Leader versus having their faces and words on our screens 24/7. The only historical constant of fascism is found in the appeal to an imaginary community, native to the country, which identifies with the nation and the Leader who represents it, or, in substance, an authoritarian ethno-nationalism which expresses the desire, today as it has before, to oppose any means by which a revolutionary movement could emerge that would finally do away with capitalism.

Beyond all of this and the depth of the analysis of trumpian America, Rasmussen offers us a crucial reflection on the question of democracy: "Fascism is not the opposite of democracy: it emerges from, believes in, and triumphs in its name when a crisis requires it to restore order and prevent a revolutionary alternative. Fascism is not an anomaly, but an inherent possibility in every democratic regime" (p. 134). This is why all efforts to oppose it with a democratic-antifascist front, from liberals to anarchists, are destined to fail. Furthermore, Giorgio Agamben already noted a few years ago that emergency laws announced by contemporary democracy are more liberticidal than those of historic fascism, and it is the likes of Trump and Salvini who don't hesitate to define themselves as the most fervent defenders of the democratic system (thanks to, among other things, the fact that they were elected, as Hitler was during the time of the Weimar Republic). And if it's true, as wrote Mario Tronti [Italian philosopher], that it's democracy which vanquished and annihilated the working class, we cannot understand how it is still possible to believe that de-

crisis that began in 2008. In this way "Trump protested the protest, the objective of which was to violently push back any possibility of changing the system from top to bottom" (p. 41). Similarly, this is how justified rage against the metropolis was in many countries subdued and used by those who have always controlled the very same metropolises. We cannot let this happen again which is why another corollary is that we must do away with the illusion, cultivated by the left, of the reappropriation of the metropolis or its alternative management: the metropolis is unreformable, uninhabitable, and taken hold of by a process of becoming-fascist henceforth evident to those who clearly see the reality of the situation. When we think of the Yellow Vests' France and their anti-metropolitan vocation, it's monumental that they've succeeded in avoiding a maneuver similar to those of Trump or Salvini, even if we haven't yet seen the final outcome of the situation—again, even when it comes to the Yellow Vests, the political rule goes that if we don't meaningfully and deeply strike, fascism will have every opportunity to use the force built up by the movement. If Rasmussen explains how the Trump effect succeeded in producing itself before the critique of structural racism brought by Black Lives Matter was able to be combined with a challenge to the capitalist mode of production then, in France, one should bet on the combination of social contestation, anti-metropolitanism, and ecological critique of the Yellow Vests before Power can cut communication between the different tendencies which, effectively, could just as likely develop into a broad revolutionary complex endowed with a major ability to strike as to become diverted and separated into several counter-revolutionary forces.

We can thus not allow ourselves any optimism, and, to the contrary, as Benjamin wisely said, "to organize pessimism" is in these moments the only reasonable political motto there is. A new avant-garde that combines the ecstatic euphoria of revolt with revolutionary discipline must be born and allow us to "exit" [*sortir*]. The only art that counts in that of the *exit*, as Marc'O [French playright] told us a few days ago, in a perfectly surrealist style (on the necessity of a new avant-garde refer to another recent text of M.B. Rasmussen, *After the Great Refusal*, published not without reason at the same time as the book on Trump). And I believe that this time it will be an avant-garde who turns it's back on the future and directs its gaze to the bottom.

I WRITE THIS IN A COUNTRY where Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen's book, *Trump's Counter Revolution*, was just recently translated and published by *Les Éditions Divergences* and has appeared as a valuable diagnosis for our time. These days, Italy is of particular interest to those observing the far-right in European government. The Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, who seems as though he may as well be the head of the Italian government, he's at least tipped the political scales [to the right], is the perfect expression of the Trumpian model that Rasmussen examines in his text: the manner of self-presentation, the keywords, the use of police as the primary means of governing the population, contempt for formal rules, unscrupulous use of social media, interventionism on everything and anything, racism as the only form of weaponized propaganda, or nearly so, the anti-elite rhetoric—all elements which effectively unify far-right political action on a global scale.

Anti-migrant raids done by small groups of Italian neo-fascists seem like folklore when compared to governmental action, which has as its goal to enact a perfectly capitalist and democratic project. All of the old rhetoric of the former neo-fascism—the heroes, the eternal values, the natural community, the anti-modern mysticism, etc.—will have become almost completely outdated in the face of this ultra-fascist capitalism. This goes for anti-fascist rhetoric too, needless to say.

From the United States to France, Brazil to Poland, Italy to England, a ferocious counter-revolutionary force has appeared armed with an agenda, a vision, and a common language—this is to say, a global strategy. These things are often difficult to perceive as being necessary in anti-system movements, and they are clearly lacking in the declining left. This is one of the reasons that fascist capitalism seems to be picking up speed everywhere we look.

Nevertheless, the most interesting part of Rasmussen's book does not consist of demonstrating evidence of the arrival of a certain "late fascism" but, for one, in the analysis of this governmental affirmation of the extreme right as an essential element of global counter-revolution, this is to say a reaction to the cycle of movements of 2010-2011—from Occupy, the Arab Spring and the Indignados to those of Black Lives Matter—and, also, in not separating the question of fascism from that of democracy.

The question, in particular, to which I think this book provides answers is the following: what happened in order for the powerful movements and insurrections which covered the globe at the beginning of the 2010s to have been seemingly overrun and then, honestly, defeated by the dark wave that's drowning us all?

The fact that the author, in addition to being a militant communist, is an art historian is not unrelated to his capacity to interpret the new aestheticization of politics as essential to the implementation of *social fascism* around the world. Let us refer to the chapter *Politics of the Image*, where he arrives at this conclusion: "The image is not solely a medium, it has become the substance of contemporary politics" (p. 53). On the other hand, it's a typical error of the left to regard the obvious coarseness [*grossièreté*] of the aesthetic-media operation of the *pop far-right* (if Trump uses televised models of entertainment, Salvini uses those of the bar conversation or football ultras) from the eyes of a moralist, in believing oneself to be more intelligent, refined, civilized, or ultimately more "aesthetically appealing [*beau*]" than the likes of Trump, Salvini, Orban or Bolsonaro, instead of thinking about the radical politicization of the aesthetic as an indispensable weapon in the current configuration of this historical conflict.

In a letter Karl Korsch wrote to Brecht, he said that when it comes down to it, the Nazi *Blitzkrieg* was not more than the energy of the left concentrated and then released by other means: this energy which in the 1920s seemed to be spreading and be pushing towards a Europe of [communist] Councils, which ten years later had been redirected and found itself used by its adversaries who would launch the global working class into a gigantic and fratricidal "material battle" that would not be able to achieve any other end than the spiritual and material annihilation of the working class as it was, from which came the defeat of every revolutionary perspective of the 20th century. At

the moment of the defeat, Benjamin had to acknowledge, much to his dismay, that the fascists seemed to understand better than the revolutionary left the rules which govern popular emotions and feelings, affects which today are still regarded by every nuance of the left with an air of superiority, if not outright disdain, and they always prefer "rational", "common sense", "progressive", or "civic" arguments, which is to say all that that not only fails to convince practically anyone among the working class, but which, on the contrary, generates the opposite effect of producing even more hatred and resentment.

It is this which produced Trump who "partially recuperated Occupy's analysis concerning the financial crisis and bank bailouts" (p. 43), while in Italy, popular hatred of the elites was captured and redirected in the war against migrants, the Romani, and the ticks (ticks (*zecche*) is a name given to activists in Italian social centers). All of this has the backdrop of the obvious contempt of all those who feel the need to oppose the institutions of the European Union which are destined, for better or for worse, to be transformed by "sovereignism". In Brazil, the left's corruption, its faith in the economy, its pretension to know how to govern capitalism better than others, its chronic distrust of autonomous movements, and, *it goes without saying*, its anti-revolutionary vocation have delivered the country an executioner of Bolsonaro's caliber. We could go down the path of demonstrating this having happened in many other countries. The movements, for their part, have missed the *kairos* [kairos is an Ancient Greek word meaning the right, critical, or opportune moment (Wikipedia)] for transforming their power into a proper revolutionary force and a good part of this now returns against them. From this we gather a sort of political law which is of personal concern to us: in periods of significant change, each error of interpretation, each error of underestimation, each moment lacking in courage, every hesitation in the unfolding of a potentially revolutionary moment, contributes in an increase in the power of the enemy, of fascism. The corollary of this law is that we must be done with every leftist affect with inhabits us.

Another important element that Rasmussen brings to our attention is how Trump, faced with the metropolitan youth of Occupy and the African Americans of Black Lives Matter, knew how to mobilize white workers and employees who lived outside or on the margins of urban centers who suffered the hardest blows of the economic